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Questions involved in determining the content, timing, and relevance of classical curriculums in secondary schools and college language programs are raised here. A recommended type of classics program, designed to present Latin as a tool in understanding and enriching literature, culture, and civilization, is outlined. (JH)

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NEW CLASSICAL CURRICULA: AN EXERCISE IN THREE UNKNOWNS

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NEW CLASSICAL CURRICULA: AN EXERCISE IN THREE UNKNOWNS

The following ideas were presented at a panel discussion of the articulation of the Latin curriculum at the CAMWS meeting of April 1965.

I BEGIN WITH a premise which I will not argue here: that many of us are dissatisfied with the classical curriculum we have; we should like to see a change. I want to allude to some of the difficulties that beset any attempt to formulate a new curriculum. I do not mean the practical difficulties, which are certainly formidable. It may seem quixotic to be talking about new curricula at a time when teachers in many parts of the country are waging a last-ditch battle to keep Latin—even two years of it—in the curriculum at all. I do not overlook or minimize that battle. But whether we win it, or lose it and have to start all over again, there are certain questions of a broader, more theoretical nature which must be answered before we can hope for an enduring place in American education.

Before stating my three unknowns, I must ask your pardon for betraying my age: I am going to put these questions in the frame of a journey by railroad train. My nominations, then, for the three unknowns that beset any attempt to draft new classical curricula are:

1. Who is the passenger—i.e. the student—and what is his destination?
2. Where will he get on the train and how long will he be aboard? (This implies that he probably will not make the whole trip on our train.)
3. What do we want to do to him while he is on the train? (This implies that we do not want him just to sit there looking out the window, getting a vague idea of the scenery.)

Now a case could be made for the thesis that we know the answers to these questions:

1. The student is upper-class or upper-middle-class white, most likely in a largish town or a suburb, and he is going to college. Beyond that, he is going to "take his place in American life," to "become a force for good in his community," etc. (Latin is doing all right in largish towns and in the suburbs. It is in trouble in small towns and has declined catastrophically in big-city schools. Parents who want their children to get on in the world send them to private or suburban public schools, and those are the kinds of schools that are most likely still to offer a place to Latin.)
2. He will probably get aboard the train at the ninth grade and get off it two or three years later. He will follow this pattern because the train seldom runs before the ninth grade and most of the passengers continue their journey by other, more modern forms of transport. (It is a very old-fashioned train and many of the passengers get impatient with it.)
3. We want to teach him "grammar." or Latin derivatives in English, or the beauties of Latin literature, or "a sense of the past," or "a comprehension of humanistic values," etc.

But if we take a really hard look at the questions, as a preliminary to drafting a really new curriculum, it becomes evident that we do not know the answers to any of them. They are unknowns. The alleged answers are statistical, and you do not educate statistics; or they are merely based on habit; or they are just plain vague.

1. The identification of the Latin student which I cited is a relic of our past, when only gentlemen's sons—and the very brightest of farm boys—studied Latin and went to college. Even in its reduced and impotent state, Latin is a snob symbol. And the identification of the student's destination is intolerably vague and simplistic. More of this in a moment.
2. During this century it has become customary for the train to make its first stop at the ninth grade. This was part of the 8-4 pattern in American primary and secondary education. It has no other basis, and the growing tendency towards other patterns—6-2-4, 6-3-3—has put it in jeopardy.
3. The usual aims proposed for the Latin course are either absurdly pretentious or pathetically modest, or both at the same time. In any case

they seldom claim to *do anything* to the student, to change his behavior or his basic atitudes.

Modern situations are vastly more complex than those which were foreseen by the classical curriculum of a century ago. Thus:

1. The student is not a statistic but an individual. He comes to us with a particular intelligence, temperament, and set of potential interests. And his destination is varied in direct proportion to the variability of his characteristics and the almost infinite complication of the needs of modern society. He may turn out to be personnel manager of a machine-tool factory catering to assemblers of aircraft components in California; director of a state fishery research unit specializing in oyster rehabilitation off Long Island; first-chair string-bass of the Toledo Symphony Orchestra; professor of medieval history at Western Michigan State University; or President of the United States. Whatever the specialty, it is certain that most of our Latin students are going to end up by becoming specialists (and not in Latin); and we almost never have any way of knowing, at the time when they are Latin students, what the specialty will be.

Question for the curriculum maker: How can his curriculum do justice to the enormously varied initial talents and interests of his students, and also provide something apposite and useful for the infinitely ramified web of activities in which they will ultimately be engaged? Can and should the classical curriculum be all things to all students?

2. Efforts are being made, and I think some of them will be successful, to get Latin into the seventh or eighth grade (in a few places it may be even earlier). But probably a majority of those who elect Latin at all will still begin it in the ninth grade. On the other hand, in the battle royal which is now being waged by the various subjects for space in the high school curriculum, Latin may end up, in some places, in the eleventh and twelfth grades. Some students—not very many, probably—will begin it as freshmen in college. Again, even at present there are some who begin Latin later in college—though at that stage it is more likely to be Greek—or even in graduate school. These include people who have suddenly discovered, halfway through college or later, that they need Latin—or Greek—for work in archaeology, ancient or medieval history, Renaissance literature, musicology, or whatever. Under present conditions such students are often inhibited from beginning the language, or they do not have time to carry it far enough. For them it is "too late." Yet they represent an important, though small, body of potential recruits.

Question for the curriculum maker: Can he and should he draft a program which will be usable at all or several of these ages and stages? Can we have a single curriculum, or will there have to be four or five distinct ones?

3. The old answers concerning what we want the student to learn in the classical program are too vague and superficial, and too scattered. Above all, they do not focus on any *active* engagement of the student with the material; they mostly treat Latin as a spectator sport.

Question for the curriculum maker: Can he come up with a program which actively engages the student at every level? And can the program be more or less the same throughout, or will it have to include completely different activities for seventh grade, ninth grade, eleventh grade, fourteenth grade?

In all these questions you will notice that two themes intermingle: unity and variety. It is Plato's old dilemma: the One and the Many. We have had, on the whole, a monolithic curriculum fixed in time and content, beginning in grade 9 (age 15) and moving through a canonical order: Caesar, Cicero, Vergil in high school, Cicero's essays, Livy, Catullus, Roman comedy in the first year of college, and so on. If we now propose to break this fixed pattern—and I think we must—are we necessarily committed to endless variation and loss of unity? I do not think so. We must combine unity *and* variety.

I would suggest, as a clue through the labyrinth or as a basis for discussion, two complementary principles: ability to read the language, and a desire to read it in order to get at significant material which is of interest to the student. Our present Latin course does not really equip the student to read the language. It leads him through—or more often past—certain texts and authors; but in college, or even in graduate school if he lasts that long, he still cannot read Latin. A new classical curriculum—any new curriculum—must begin with an intensive drive to help the student learn to read the language. Not certain authors, but the language.

Naturally it will take different lengths of time to achieve this goal at different levels. A graduate student may do it in a fraction of the time that it will take a student who begins in the seventh grade. But the linguistic structure to be learned is essentially the same, regardless of the student's age; the skill is therefore essentially the same; and I believe that the materials and procedures used to achieve it can be essentially the same, so that if the programs or lessons are soundly conceived and lead straight toward the goal, a college junior or a graduate student will be no more bored with them than a seventh-grader.

Once the skill is attained—and I think it can be done very much more quickly than we have assumed in the past, but it will take a nationwide

effort to define and enforce the process—most Latin texts and authors lie open to the student. The traditional *scala* does not represent a real order of difficulty: Caesar is not really easier than Cicero, or Vergil than Livy. The structural principle of the curriculum should not be texts or authors but issues or types of interest. Here I do think a certain ascending order can be established, but only as a broad norm, with allowance for many possible variations. I would suggest three successive foci of attention or interest, corresponding in general to a rising level of sophistication in the student and increasing complexity in the material, but with each focus present at every stage of study:

1. People and their actions. The focus is on individuals and what they do. Biography is the indicated mode: Nepos, Sallust, Suetonius, but material can be drawn also from Cicero, Catullus, Livy, Plautus, Ovid, Seneca, Martial, et al.
2. Morals and politics. The implications of the actions of individuals; the organization of their interactions in society; the ideal aims and actual workings of a political system (specifically, the Roman Republic). Rich material from Caesar, Cicero, Sallust, Lucretius, Catullus, Augustus, Suetonius, Pliny, Juvenal, et al.
3. Aesthetic order. The imaginative structuring of experience, including people, events, morals, politics, into aesthetically ordered wholes. The objects for study here could be a Terentian play, a Ciceronian speech, a Horatian or Propertian ode, the *Aeneid*, the banquet of Trimalchio, etc. The point of the study is to analyze *and feel* the aesthetic structure. (Here poetry would probably take the lead over prose.)

If the student—and the teacher—can read Latin, a program like this can achieve both unity and diversity as it goes on in high school and college. The class can focus on a given core of texts in a given term or year while individual students range widely, following their individual interests, in other texts or even in coins and inscriptions. Of course this would require the marshaling of large tracts of literature and other texts, to make them available to students at all levels from seventh grade to graduate school. And that would require cooperative labor for a generation or two, and financial support. But anything short of it amounts to a betrayal of the possibilities implicit in our heritage.

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